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ABSTRACT

This article is intended to provide adult basic education teachers with examples of functional learning activities for their students through use of the newspaper. It lists activities which are illustrations of those that can be used to teach functional skills in the key areas of reading and computation. For reading, suggested activities include (1) determine the main idea of the article by identifying who, what, when, where, and why; (2) distinguish whether a story contains fact, fiction, or opinion; (3) build vocabulary; and (4) identify parts of speech. Suggested computation activities are (1) calculate sales tax; (2) determine salaries, wages, and rents for specified periods; and (3) compare prices through ads. Strategies are also given to expand the list of potential activities. (YLB)

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TECHNíQUES

Edited from the Virginia ABE Newsletter

Daily Newspapers Provide Real Life Teaching-Learning Materials

Because of the growing emphasis on returning to "basics" in education, the introduction of the newspaper in both public schools and ABE programs is of increasing importance. Using the newspaper to assign work of practical value bridges the gap between the classroom and the "real" world by allowing students the opportunities to become independent readers and to learn some basic skills of survival: finding a job, making consumer choices, budgeting, and solving other practical problems of adulthood. As a "living text," the newspaper is especially meaningful to the adult. While furnishing information that can be used to develop specific skills, newspapers also increase the student's awareness of current social and economic issues and problems.

The primary purpose of this article is to provide ABE teachers with examples of functional learning activities for their students through use of the newspaper. First, students can be asked what they most want to learn about. These areas can then be taught by using the relevant areas in the newspaper. The newspaper and other sources can also be employed to build, within each student, the skills necessary to acquire information. These skills can then be applied in other content areas and eventually in students' daily lives. By allowing a learner to choose any article in the paper to practice a specific skill, the teacher is encouraging that student to combine an assignment with reading of his or her individual choice. The best thing about using newspapers in the classroom is that students can eventually achieve the satisfaction of handling an everyday resource with ease and confidence.

The activities listed below are illustrations of those that can be used to teach functional skills in the key areas of reading and computation.

Reading

1. Determine the main idea of an article by identifying the 5W's — who, what, when, where and why. (Beginning readers can focus on pictures, headlines and first paragraphs of news stories (the lead) which define the 5W's.)
2. Distinguish whether a given story contains fact, fiction or opinion.
3. Build vocabulary.
4. Identify parts of speech.

Computation

1. Calculate sales tax.
2. Determine salaries, wages, and rents for specified periods.
3. Compare prices through ads. (Help students to decide the best places to shop and to see what they are getting for their money.)

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Activities dealing with functional skills are limitless when using the newspaper. Students can fill out coupons, plan grocery shopping lists, find store locations, learn to categorize, follow directions, and interpret weather maps. Here are some strategies which will expand the list of potentials:

1. Plan how to motivate students to spend free time skimming the newspaper.
2. Establish a newspaper sharing time to encourage the exchange of ideas and critical thinking.
3. Allow students to use articles that are of interest to them as motivational devices in their efforts to master basic skills.
4. Arrange a way for students to keep a record of their newspaper projects and their completed work. Provide for project number, date started, date completed, student comments and teacher comments.
5. Evaluate students' work from their attitudes and by interpreting their recorded comments. This will enable you to see whether particular assignments were meaningful and what students learned from them.
6. Plan ways that students can dramatize events from newspapers, write and sell advertisements, be news reporters, share recipes from the paper, etc.
7. Obtain free materials from the newspapers Education Coordinator in your area.

This article has presented only a few of the many possibilities for using the newspaper as an instructional aid in the ABE classroom. Resourceful ABE teachers and students can expand this content with their own ideas.

Donna DiGregrio

The preceding article has been adapted from a videotape/lecturette prepared by Donna DiGregrio, who until recently was School Service Coordinator for Norfolk's two daily newspapers: The Virginia-Pilot and the Ledger Star.